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Collaboration Between Intelligence Services in the Present-Day World: Challenges and Issues

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Seeking to ensure their national interests, states have traditionally taken advantage of opportunities offered by what is known as intelligence diplomacy, involving official bilateral or multilateral collaboration between foreign intelligence services.

Foreign intelligence services have accumulated considerable experience in working together in various areas, and this applies not only to allied countries.

the experience of Russia's foreign intelligence service, which is currently marking its 100th anniversary, is interesting and instructive. Created on December 20, 1920, the Foreign Department of the Cheka, the original predecessor of Russia's foreign intelligence services (the Foreign Department-the First Main Directorate-the SVR), established first official contacts with several intelligence services of other countries.

the high reputation of the Soviet intelligence service was also evidenced by the U.S. proposal that the Soviet and U.S. intelligence services join forces during World War II to defeat a common enemy.

the SVR is convinced that the existing and potential threats to world peace are a strategic challenge to intelligence services. the Russian intelligence service is ready to respond to this challenge promptly and effectively by leveraging its entire analytical and operational capabilities, as well as corresponding infrastructure for maintaining contacts with its foreign partners.

these days, the SVR collaborates to some degree or other with almost all major intelligence and counterintelligence services in the CIS member countries, as well as in the West, Central and eastern Europe, the Asia-Pacific region, the Far east, Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa.

It has to be acknowledged that current tensions between Russia and the West are affecting the SVR's relations with intelligence agencies in other countries, primarily in the U.S. and Western Europe, among others.

The international intelligence community has long recognized the global nature of the threat of international terrorism and its formidable destructive potential. terrorism has spun its web over virtually every part of the world. Its components can quickly change tactics, adapting to the environment, including the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. So, we still regard terrorism as a main threat to civilization and therefore consider the fight against terrorism a top priority for national intelligence services at present.

Time itself demands not only new forms and methods of intelligence cooperation, but also the decisive abandonment of any politicization and double standards in dealing with this problem. We hope that our partners, who are still encumbered by old dogmas, will have enough wisdom to engage in honest and constructive cooperation.

In recent years, cybersecurity has taken center stage in the collaborative efforts of foreign intelligence services across the world. According to the World Economic Forum, illegal online activity is currently among the five most serious global risks.

The time we live in is often characterized as an era of global changes. the modern world order is going through a most profound crisis. old centers of power are disappearing, and new ones are emerging,

bringing new challenges and threats to humanity. this poses a truly strategic challenge to all intelligence services in ensuring the security of their respective states.

Europe Between the U.S. and China

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The conflict between the United States and the People's Republic of China is increasingly taking on a systemic and, in a certain historical perspective, irreversible character. It unfolds not only in the economic, geopolitical, military, technological, and humanitarian dimensions of the bilateral relations, but also in the civilizational dimension.

The next, quite logical and strategically justified step of the conflicting parties, who understand the irreversibility and long-term nature of their conflict, is to search for strategic allies, fellow travelers and trusted partners, and engage in diplomatic "influencing." this Europe is an important, maybe even the most important, focus of this search.

The European Union is an important and lucrative export market for the People's Republic of China, perhaps to a greater extent than the U.S. market.

The structure of Sino-European trade, in terms of its product mix, practically mirrors trade between China and the United States, but, at the same time, it is more balanced. While the American trade deficit with China constituted \$375 billion in 2017, the deficit with Europe was only about half as much (\$194 billion) despite the approximately equal trade volume.

The prospects and importance of the EU as a foreign economic partner of the PRC is largely determined by the fact that China has never viewed the European union as a geopolitical, historical or civilizational rival or competitor in its movement towards the role of the second global pole of the world. Here, the EU differs significantly from the United States. this absence of the direct confrontation places the EU in harmony with the current state of the Chinese export-oriented economy despite their divergence on a number of significant ideological values and regional interests.

Considering the military-strategic aspect, NATO – the military component of the EU – still remains a full-fledged military bloc under the auspices of the United States, and with the United States playing the central role. China, which, along with Russia, has been declared the main American rival and competitor by U.S. policy documents, cannot help but feel the weight of such a designation. Article 5 of the NATO Charter, which presupposes the joint defense against an aggression in the event of an attack or a threat against a member of the alliance, is quite applicable to the PRC as well.

The boom in economic interaction, primarily in trade and Chinese investment in the EU, was especially noticeable after the global financial crisis of 2008-2009. the PRC-EU foreign trade turnover has increased significantly over these years, and the volume of accumulated direct Chinese investments in the EU in 2009-2017 amounted to 300 billion dollars, of which about 40 billion related to construction projects.⁵ According to various estimates, EU companies generated from 300 to 500 billion dollars annually in global value chains with China during the second decade of the 21st century – a very significant share of the total GDP of the EU countries.

Despite the growth and even a boom in economic relations and investment cooperation, tensions and problems between the EU and the PRC have accumulated and became visible following the crisis of 2008- 2009. they were similar to the Sino-American antagonism.

In fact, the European union summarized its complaints against China in the landmark policy document “EU-China: a strategic perspective” adopted by the European Commission in March 2019, which marked the end of the “honeymoon” period in the economic interactions between the parties.

The document significantly differed from the earlier documents of this kind. Much less tolerant in its wording, it contained direct criticism and set specific final deadlines for China to meet the demands.

The Coronavirus Pandemic, the development of the virus situation in China and its global consequences have played an overall negative role for the dynamics of China's relations with Europe.

Inevitable further politicization of this problem (primarily at the urging of the trump administration) and the White House accusations against China – of withholding information, mistrust of the international community, and all the way up to conspiracy theories of the “planned” introduction of coronavirus – led to a chain foreign policy reaction. In this situation, both sides of the political and media confrontation, European and Chinese, behaved following the scenario that was far from optimal, albeit politically predictable. The European Commission, unfortunately, has almost completely accepted trump's ideological and one-sided version of events, in essence, without separating ideology from the real context of actions in China. Chinese diplomacy also proved unable to meet the challenge.

European countries have no ability or desire to significantly influence the balance of power in east Asia and Indo-Pacific, the main and critical zone of the U.S.-China confrontation. As NATO members, however, they, are likely to play a major role of the U.S. allies in countering the power and influence of China on a global scale.

It is not typical for Europeans to impart a civilizational, supra-political character to the confrontation with China, in contrast to the United States, which seems to be moving toward this position.

On the Current Migration Situation in the European Union: The Example of Germany

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There are concerns in European countries about the possibility of recurrence of the 2015-2016 migration crisis in the near future. Doubts about the readiness of the European union to resist a new wave of refugees from crisis regions and ensure protection of the bloc's external borders are confirmed by statistical data. At the end of 2019, turkey, the EU's southern neighbor, experienced an increase in migration pressure when the total number of Syrian refugees in the country reached almost 3.7 million.

As a result of the unilateral opening of the Turkish border with Greece at the end of February (it was closed on March 18 due to the threat of the spread of coronavirus), about 20,000 illegal migrants accumulated on the border. Many of them are not Syrian refugees fleeing the war but nationals of other states. For quite a lot of Afghans and Iraqis, turkey is a transit country on their way to Europe.

In political terms, the persistence of tensions around Greece puts pressure on the European union to develop security measures to prevent another migration crisis. As the first step in supporting Greece, Brussels has pledged 700 million euros in financial aid to strengthen the border. the bloc has sent coastal patrol boats, helicopters, and experts from Frontex and the European Asylum Support office. According to President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, those “who seek to test Europe's unity will be disappointed. the European union stands in solidarity with Greece, which acts as our external border.”

Regardless of how the situation with the arrival of minors will evolve, the German federal states are ready to expediently receive an “adequate” number of migrants. About 25,000 beds are available in temporary refugee housing units throughout Germany.

According to sociologists, five years ago, Germany was engulfed by “welcome culture” toward those in need arriving from crisis regions. the guarantee of asylum to persecuted persons, stipulated in Article 16a of the Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany, was interpreted as one of the reasons for Angela Merkel’s “humanitarian imperative,” which allowed anyone to enter Germany unhindered. Subsequent events such as the strengthening of the institution of illegal migration, the aggravation of crime, the emergence of terrorist threat, growing social tensions and financial burden on the recipient society have caused significant shifts in citizens’ attitudes toward the decisions on migration policy made by the German leadership.

Not all politicians, first and foremost at the regional level, are confident in the proportionality of protective measures and the preparedness of German society for another migration crisis. Representatives of north Rhine-Westphalia, the region with consistently highest numbers of asylum applications since 2016 (33,879 in 2019, 39,579 in 2018, 53,343 in 2017, 196,734 in 2016), have been cautious on this point.¹⁶ According to Serap Güler, the NRW Minister for Integration, Germany does not have the safety margin for accepting and accommodating another 1 million people and for their socialization and employment.

The coronavirus pandemic that began earlier this year is also impacting the migration situation in Europe, requiring adjustments to the practice of accepting refugees from crisis regions. According to the Federal office for Migration and Refugees, the epidemic has led to a temporary halt in accepting refugees fleeing for humanitarian reasons. the asylum applications are being reviewed on an exceptional basis. the implementation of the resettling program for refugees in distress, including Syrians from turkey and Lebanon, has been suspended.

At the moment, no immediate threat of a repeat of the events of 2015-2016 is present. Statistics over the past four years confirm the easing of migration pressure on the European continent. Despite the difficult situation at the places of compact refugee accommodation in Greece, the number of refugees living there and the current quantitative indicators of asylum applications submitted in EU member states (in particular, in Germany) are low in comparison with the crisis period. the mechanism for protecting the EU external borders has been improved, the EU-Turkey agreement continues to be implemented, and assistance is provided to exodus countries. It seems that the discussion regarding the admission of refugee minors as a gesture of Europe’s “solidarity” with Greece will see limited and merely symbolic practical implementation.

Should the epidemic gain ground in countries with poor social and medical services and high population density, a significant increase in migration pressure on the European continent cannot be ruled out. the traditional economic migrants will be joined by those fleeing the pandemic. one of the regions at risk is north Africa, which is one of Europe’s main migration donors.

Despite the fact that the spread of coronavirus is viewed by the EU as a direct challenge both to the security and well-being of poor countries located near the EU borders, the EU border countries (Greece, Spain, Italy, and Malta) may at the first stage be left facing the growing migration problem on their own, in a manner similar to that of 2015-2016. this scenario will require speedy development of measures to counter the mass and rapid influx of refugees and the creation of the infrastructure for primary accommodation with emergency rooms for urgent medical care.

Kyoto-2: The Lame Duck of West European Climate Diplomacy Lessons Learned **From the International Climate Process**

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Issues concerning global climate change – by objective criteria, one of the most serious environmental threats of our time – have for many years been filling the top slots of the international agenda, and the political temperature of debates on this topic remains at the highest degree.

Soon a new milestone will be reached on the thorny path of the international climate process: on December 31, 2020, the Doha Amendment to the Kyoto Protocol of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) comes into force.

The UN member states first attempted to find a key to the climate issue back in the early 1990s, when the aforementioned UN Framework Convention on Climate Change was adopted in 1992.

But then came a long, laborious marathon of negotiations – from the drafting of the Kyoto Protocol to the UNFCCC (1997) to the adoption of the Paris Climate Agreement (2015) – characterized by a series of shining successes and some quite painful failures.² The chaotic work of the Hague Conference (2000), which led to its suspension for six months, was followed by jubilation at the results of the Marrakesh meeting (2001), when the parties finally managed to complete their negotiations on an entire set of rules for the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol.

What has been happening on the UNFCCC negotiation stage during all these years can be compared to the inverted looking-glass world of Alice in Wonderland.

In 2000, the session held in the Hague was chaired, as is customary in the practice of the UNFCCC, by a representative of the host country, at that time Jan Pronk, the Dutch Minister of Housing, Spatial Planning and the environment. His poorly disguised political bias, unwillingness to listen to partners and, in particular, his pointedly arrogant refusal to yield the floor to the Russian official representative, forced the Russian delegation in the Hague to resort to a technique that is rarely used in modern diplomatic practice – temporarily leaving the conference room in protest during a session.

Incidentally, the Hague was also the venue where the European Union's "green aggressiveness" vividly manifested itself; that attitude had negative repercussions for the future of the Kyoto Protocol.

As time went on, such "oddities" would continue to crop up in the EU's behavior. In 2001, several grueling hours of night consultations were initiated by Margaret Beckett, the UK's Secretary of State for the environment, Food and Agriculture, in Marrakesh. She unrelentingly tried to convince the Russian delegation that the threshold proposed to our country for the allowable offset of emissions under the Kyoto Protocol due to the absorptive capacity of forests – an offset maximum that differed by only a few units from the agreed-upon indicator for Japan – was a "good deal." But the objective fact was the following: the area of forested lands in Japan in 2002 was about 25 million hectares, whereas in Russia it was 621 million hectares – almost 25 times more!³ But for some reason, Ms. Beckett believed that we should agree on numbers that were practically on the same order of magnitude as Japan's.

The events of the Doha Conference (2012) top this list of so-called anti-records of "Alice in Wonderland" environmental diplomacy.

Responding to a request by the Qatari Prime Minister and seeking to find ways to correct the clearly abnormal situation (while preserving the possibility of reaching a constructive conclusion), Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine jointly prepared a compromise proposal. After urgent informal consultations under

the leadership of the conference's chairman, Abdullah bin Hamad al-Attiyah, deputy prime minister of Qatar, a course of action was determined. one of the points agreed upon was that the chairman would submit the Russian-Belarussian-Ukrainian proposal for formal consideration at the plenary session.

Yet... the chairman did not keep his word.

The most remarkable thing is that, after Doha, the EU dragged out ratification of the Doha Amendment for five years. It was apparently pondering the situation it was in – as the only major player committed to quantitative reduction of emissions under Kyoto-2, plus commitments to provide financial assistance for developing countries to meet their climate goals.

Now all hopes are pinned on the Paris Agreement. However, the international community needs to learn serious lessons from the almost 30- year history of the climate process – all the zigzags and failures, all attempts to use techniques of “smoke-and-mirrors diplomacy” – so that future efforts to counter global climate change are truly comprehensive, balanced, and rest on a solid foundation of the rules and basic principles of the un and make a real, not fictional, contribution to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. I venture to assert that if this is not done, the Paris Climate Agreement, which took years of painstaking diplomatic work, may suffer the sad fate of Kyoto-2.

BRICS: The Pluralism of Business Cultures

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The five member countries of BRICS – Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa – possess significant economic resources and are significant political actors. on January 1, 2020, BRICS' rotating one-year chairmanship passed over to Russia. the motto of the Russian chairmanship is “BRICS Strategic Partnership for global Stability, Shared Security and Innovative growth.” But the business cultures of the five countries seriously differ from one another, and it is essential to launch discussions to prevent these differences from causing misunderstandings and consequent conflicts.

BRICS is developing a system of cross-cultural management. Serious attention is paid in the organization to studying and to trying to eliminate causes of intercultural conflicts. Research is done on characteristics of national business cultures to find ways for building long-term cooperation among member countries and organizations in them. this, among other things, involves studies of behavioral patterns.

We believe that a textbook by Professor Sergey Myasoyedov and Larisa Borisova offers the most accurate and exhaustive definition of cross-cultural management: “Cross-cultural management is the management of human behavior and an art of building relationships at junctures of business cultures.”

Leading world experts assume justly that BRICS is a new geopolitical association intended to oppose the U.S.-led Western unipolar global hegemony.

Today the BRICS countries show a desire to transform their growing economic might into an instrument of geopolitical influence.

It is a weak point of BRICS, however, that it has no organizational structure, central administrative body or headquarters, unlike many other international organizations, such as the Eurasian economic union (EAEU), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), or the Shanghai Cooperation organization (SCO). BRICS does most of its routine work at summits. each member countries holds the chairmanship of the organization on a rotating basis for a period of one year.

BRICS' only full-scale cooperation instrument is the new Development Bank (NDB).

The BRICS countries see the NDB as an alternative to other international financial institutions. The bank is planned to finance infrastructure projects in BRICS countries by quickly providing them with easy-term loans.

Foreign analysts usually do not consider BRICS a firmly established close, well-structured and viable union. They rather see it as a kind of club without a common strategy, or even a temporary group. This largely explains why they analyze each BRICS country separately.

According to foreign researchers, Russian business culture is very different from other business cultures. One reason is that, for nearly three centuries, Russia was isolated from Europe by Mongol-Tatar rule.

Corruption is a serious problem in all BRICS countries without exception. On Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index for 2019, India and China share 80th place, each with a score of 41.

Russia has developed an anti-corruption strategy for BRICS that involves a range of coordinated measures by the five countries, including new legislation, joint education programs for civil servants, and more extensive cooperation among law enforcement agencies in seeking to recover stolen assets.

There is a theory that "internationalisation will create, or at least lead to, a common culture worldwide." However, the reality of interaction between national cultures is completely different. It is still a long way from internationalization and a common culture that is everyone perceives and understands the same way.

Russia forms the core of BRICS since its business culture, though still in the making, absorbs traditions of various cultures. As has quite often happened in history, Russia may become a unifier of cultures.

The World Economy Before and After the Coronavirus Pandemic

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The principal means of recovery and reconstruction of the world economy after the present crisis will be the global management of the process of globalization. An important role will also be played by a Federal Europe that is capable of being an effective player in historical, economic, and social terms.

In the early 1980s, however, some analysts began to believe that the relationship between economic growth and fair distribution was not a straight line. A curve would be more correct. In fact, what this means is that in a society with a small number of rich and very rich people and a large number of poor and extremely poor people, economic growth cannot happen because the market volume is insufficient to support the production of goods. In this situation, who do you sell houses, cars, household appliances, and food to, in large volumes and of high quality?

On the other hand, if everyone in a society has equal income, the "spring" that gives impetus to the savings and investment policy ceases to work. It is obvious that the state that has a monopoly on the means of production tends to make mistakes in its strict production planning. At the same time, it is unable to use the power of the market system to form a goods pricing policy and use resources efficiently.

These two extreme views in economic theory reflect the distortions in the relationship between economic growth and fair distribution of resources. In reality, there is a curve that specifies the greatest growth potential with the best and most equitable distribution of income.

When few are rich and many are poor, the economy is not growing and income distribution remains grossly unfair; when all are equal, income distribution is absolutely equal for all, but without growth, everybody's incomes are low: all are equal and poor.

On the other hand, the West, especially Europe with its capitalist market economy, has demonstrated the strongest economic growth and the most equitable distribution of income in history, despite the obvious limitations and injustices it creates. In addition, Europe has created a welfare state that has now been in existence for more than 70 years. Despite its shortcomings and limitations, it guarantees more and better for all citizens than any other continent in the world.

Hence it follows that world superiority in the 21st century will be ensured not only by economic and productive factors but will also be primarily contingent on finding the right balance between economic wellbeing and individual freedoms.

In the dominant economic theory, until the 1930s, neoclassical economists argued that only one equilibrium was possible in a market economy. This conclusion was based on the fact that, in their interpretation, in all markets with pure competition – without the authority of a single operator – the economic system will always maintain the balance of full employment. Therefore, the economic policy of the state does not, in fact, play any role whatsoever and needs to abide by strict rules so as not to violate the laws of the market.

Keynes's general theory demonstrated that a market economy does not have a single equilibrium point corresponding to full employment but can have "multiple" equilibria. When production falls, employment falls, and, consequently, demand falls. When demand falls, so does production, triggering a downward spiral.

The Coronavirus CRISIS and the subsequent global economic crisis have shone the light on what should have been taken into account in the last 20 years at least. In the beginning of the 2000s, a number of experts, who were not listened to at the time, wrote that in the context of globalization with no global government and no common rules, the real world economy will face uncontrollable global crises.

Over the course of nearly two decades, a misconception has been forming that the old group of Seven can rule the world, and the new group of twenty was nothing more than a meeting of the homeowners' association. Besides, in recent years, the administration of the U.S. President Donald Trump has thrown overboard the principle of multilateralism and engaged in dangerous bilateral acts such as tariff wars and acts of retaliation, believing that it could apply the ancient technique of Horatii and Curiatii to the modern global and interconnected world.

While the West maintains silence, China and its embassies are actively campaigning to glorify the role of the CCP's authoritarian regime, its effectiveness and superiority over "outdated" Western representative democracies in the context of the fight against COVID-19. Not to mention where the virus was born and how it was concealed.

The Chinese strategy to achieve world domination began many years ago. Its hallmark has been gaining key positions in major international organizations such as the FAO, which is now practically considered China's domain. The West must realize that this is a real challenge of the 21st century. Against this background, it can choose between two paths.

One possibility is trade wars, and not just with the goal of excluding China and other competitors from global governance.

The other possibility is to invite the leadership of China and other great powers that are no longer developing but, in fact, developed to share the responsibility of becoming part of the new group of eight to form a "government of globalization."

It is necessary to redefine the group of eight and reform the Bretton-Woods system, the WMF, the World Bank, and the WTO. Europe, in its turn, needs to rethink its fundamental treaties and restore the strength of the European Union.

There are at least five sectors where EU member states have already lost their national sovereignty, or the ability to make decisions independently, over the course of the past 20 years: defense and security, migration, foreign policy, large infrastructure networks, energy (electricity, gas, and oil), high-level scientific research, including in the sphere of technological innovations, and training of human capital.

there are gaps in the economic measures that are currently being taken. the major one exists in Europe. the EU has taken a significant step within the framework of the approved support programs (European Stability Mechanism, Investment Bank, and the SURE unemployment fund) by allocating €540 billion, but that is not enough.

I have become convinced that the 21st century of globalization is in dire need of a new world governance and a new political Europe. today, what once seemed urgent has become extremely urgent, if not irretrievably lost. We must all ask ourselves: Are we creating the conditions for a new unmanageable global crisis to unfold over the next few years?

The Conflict of Meanings: The U.S. Electoral System in Crisis

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The results of the 2020 U.S. presidential elections represent the exact opposite of the outcome hoped for both in the United States and beyond.

While a significant part of American society is expected to remain in doubt about the winner of the U.S. presidential election for a long time to come, we can already name the loser with confidence. the losing party here is American democracy itself – the same democracy, which the United States and many other countries tend to regard as exemplary, whose provisions and practices are used as a reference point, and to which fledgling democracies often look up when developing electoral procedures of their own.

According to the letter of American law, on November 3, American citizens were not electing the president of the United States. Instead, residents of each state voted for specially appointed electors, whose lists were proposed by the Republican and Democratic parties, respectively.

Since the country holds no federal elections, there can be no central election commission or any other authority responsible for developing standards for the electoral process, organizing elections and suppressing violations. Instead, in the United States, the State Department of each state handles elections in the state and does so completely independently of the colleagues from other states. Accordingly, there are 50 agencies that administer an election, 50 different voting standards, 50 voter registration databases, and 50 variants of the electoral legislation.

The level of centralization, unification and quality control in the holy of holies of the American democracy – its electoral system – is in many ways inferior to that of a chain business enterprise, such as McDonald's or Starbucks.

The combination of electoral decentralization, including voter registration and voting by mail, centralization of political organizations interested in the election results, and weak privacy protection creates a massive breach in the American elections' safety from fraud.

In the absence of a central electoral body, major media outlets have taken responsibility for collecting the initial vote count information.

On election night, they independently contact county and state counting headquarters and collect the data across the country

Another tradition expresses itself in the deep belief that all the electoral process participants – both voters and employees of election commissions – act in good faith.

The most important tradition of the American electoral process is the admission of defeat by a losing candidate. So, now, when trump refused to concede his defeat based on the results of an unofficial count reported by the press, the country's largest media companies condemned him for violating a consecrated, decades-old historical tradition and accused him of undermining the foundations of democracy.

The traditional model of democracy assigned a key role to the press. Journalists were supposed to broadcast information about the course of the election campaign to the public as impartially as possible, conduct investigations in order to check whether the candidates' reputation corresponds to reality, and to help voters understand the intricacies of politics.

The behavior of the media and social networks in the pre-election and post-election periods boils down to suppressing the dissemination of information beneficial to Donald trump and promoting Joe Biden's messages.

The polarization of society is growing like an avalanche; it becomes more difficult to expect people to maintain an impartial distance from their own political beliefs when acting.

In addition, in the context of increasing radicalization and polarization of American society further exacerbated by an increase in property stratification and cultural divisions between residents of large cities and small towns, the aggravation of all the trends described above and the subsequent further degradation of the U.S. electoral system - a key component of the American democracy – can be predicted.

We agree with a number of experts that the election of a Republican or a Democrat for the U.S. presidency is of no fundamental importance to Russia.

New Horizons of Russian Cyber Diplomacy

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On December 28, 2019, the Russian president established a new division in the Foreign Ministry, the Department of International Information Security (DMIB). this showed special attention paid by the Russian leadership to the whole spectrum of issues brought into being by information and

communication technologies (ICTs) and aimed to ensure prompt and effective diplomatic reactions to challenges and threats arising in information space.

The DMIB is vested with the duties of participating in developing, implementing and advancing Russia's policy on international information security, including its position on combating the use of ICTs for military, political, terrorist or criminal purposes.

While the multipolar world order is becoming more solid, our Western opponents are clinging to traditional Cold War recipes. During the peak of the last presidential election campaign in the United States, one senior U.S. foreign policy theorist, in lobbying for a plan to set up a cybersecurity division in the State Department, wrote a treatise arguing that Washington's cyber policy should chiefly aim to deter Russia, China and, for that matter, anyone else who didn't share American ideas in matters such as independence, national sovereignty, non-interference in the affairs of other countries, and fair technological competition. It is views of this kind that underlie persistent efforts by Western powers to persuade the international community to perceive Russia and China as threats to a world based on rules.

We propose that the international community develop uniform rules of the game in information space that would consolidate tested-out principles such as non-use of force, respect for national sovereignty, noninterference in the affairs of other states, observance of fundamental human rights and freedoms, and equal rights for all states in the governance of the Internet.

Today, a rare opportunity has arisen for an accord on information security, and we are proud that Russia is making intensive efforts for this opportunity to be used.

It is obvious that, had it not been for Russia, there would have been no un-overseen negotiations on information security at all. It was Russia that a while ago put forward an initiative to set up the GGE, again with strong resistance from the West. The birth of the OEWG is a similar story. The United States and some other Western countries opposed our idea of setting it up. They were arguing fervently that an open-ended process would be a premature and ineffective measure threatening to undermine the established foundations.

The world needs modern and commensurable forms of reaction to cyber challenges and threats. For this reason, Russia has initiated drawing up the first-ever universal convention under the aegis of the United Nations to combat the criminal use of ICTs.

ASEAN remains one of the main agenda-setting bodies for information security in Asia-Pacific. We seek more extensive collaboration with ASEAN member states on the entire information security spectrum. This was the purpose of a Russia-ASEAN dialogue partnership on ICT issues that had been designed by Russia as the chief mechanism for dealing with all mutual information security issues, and was supported by all ASEAN member states.

During its first year of existence, the DMIB has done a large amount of work, has made concrete achievements, and, most importantly, has laid solid foundations for future accomplishments.

Constructive Dialogue in the Context of Forced Cooperation

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When powerful tectonic shifts affecting political and economic lives of states occur within a short time frame, it is quite reasonable to call them revolutionary in historical terms. The precursors of the changes

happening today were the collapse of the Soviet Union and the still ongoing processes of its disintegration, albeit fragmentary and of a different nature.

Over the past decade, China has gradually become a global superpower, prevailing over the U.S. in a whole range of matters. Its strength will only increase as it engages in competition with others, be it political, economic, or territorial.

Europe (and Russia is interested in a strong Europe) is in the process of searching for collective political and economic certainty, as evidenced by the UK's exit from the EU, the failure of the EU Constitution, and the member states' disagreements on many issues.

The situation in the Middle east and north Africa has been getting much more, instead of less, complicated in recent decades.

The role of people's diplomacy as a foundation that prevents dramatic events from turning into tragic ones, from the most severe regional conflicts to devastating interregional massacres, is growing in importance. therefore, it is crucial to create as many structures for live communication between states as possible, from cultural, scientific, and technological exchange to informal events for all interested segments of society and analytical groups.

There have also been significant changes in the global economy and energy sector: the "dictatorship" of hydrocarbon producers was replaced by that of their consumers; there is a universal awareness that the energy resources of the planet are much larger than experts expected. And when a sharp change of priorities occurs within a short time frame, one can talk about revolutionary changes in the global energy sector.

Perhaps the history of people's diplomacy does not know a phenomenon more significant than the Dartmouth Dialogue. the 60th anniversary of this non-governmental Russian-American movement proves that its foundations and work format were and remain unique.

In recent years, many countries have come to understand that "patronage" and "protection" of their interests is merely a world-order policy the United States has been pursuing for its own benefits and in its own interests. this is clearly understood even by the members of its alliances, be it NATO or the newly created International Religious Freedom Alliance, which has 27 member countries.

The past six-year phase of the work of the Dialogue took place in the atmosphere of unprecedentedly tense relations between Russia and the United States: the relations that posed danger not only to our nations.

In a crisis of trust and high mutual suspicion between Moscow and Washington in 2016 and 2017, the recommendations of the Dartmouth Dialogue have made a fair contribution to the formation of the fragile foundations of cooperation between the two countries in Syria and the entire Middle east region.

For the first time in the history of both countries, in January 2020, an Agreement on Cooperation between Leading Religious Institutions was signed and is being implemented. It includes a complex of joint measures Christian and Muslim denominations are to carry out with the goal of providing theological education for the youth of our countries in order to effectively counter Islamist radicalism and engage supporters of the terrorist organizations banned in the Russian Federation and the United States, such as ISIS, Muslim Brotherhood, and others.

Now, having overcome a 15-year period of failures, our country has formed an understanding of what the new Russia is, what it represents in the context of a changed world, and how it should protect and implement its own interests in the new conditions.

I would like to emphasize once again that the more challenging it is to work out solutions at the highest levels of government in this dramatic time, the more important it is to work at the level of the structures of people's diplomacy, engaging broad segments of our societies and creating a basis for non-confrontational decisions.

The Visegrád Group: A European Harbor of Ukrainian Hopes

Artyom Bobrov, *third Secretary, office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation in Rostov on Don, Candidate of Science (Sociology)*; artem.bobrow@gmail.com

In 2021, the Declaration on Cooperation between the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic, the Republic of Poland and the Republic of Hungary in Striving for European Integration¹ that laid the foundation of the Visegrád group will be 30 years old. These three decades have been filled with impressive successes and lamentable failures; with political ideas that kept them together or divided them. Moving to its next jubilee, the group has preserved its importance in Europe supported by the treaty of Accession of May 1, 2004, that made these countries EU members and has succeeded, to an extent, in attracting Brussels' political attention.

We should bear in mind the far from easy fate of these countries which explains their acute awareness of their nation-state identities. Their specific geopolitical awareness is a product of their external vulnerability to the "great powers." This makes them especially conscious of any large-scale shifts in the "balance of power."

According to extra-regional experts, there are no dominant states in the region. It seems, however, that Hungary and Poland will hardly agree. Both nurture hopes to gain regional leadership while being fully aware that their common experience of transforming the post-Communist reality was the main factor of their unification into the Visegrad group.

Today, the Visegrád group is gradually moving toward dominant positions; if the process continues and internal economic integration becomes stronger it has all chances to become the region's institutional core and the center of economic attraction for all east European states.

There is another trend that is coming to the fore where the "union" and regional interests of the V4 meet and that Brussels cannot push aside as unimportant: the former's political ideas are moving away from the classical liberal values.

We should bear in mind, however, that the relations between the Central European countries were never simple and that they probably need more time to suppress ethnic tension. This can be achieved if the political elites of the Visegrád group move their political ideas closer together and if the process is consolidated by the very much needed Austrian money.

Even the most superficial analysis of what is said by the president and the foreign minister of Ukraine confirms the impression that Ukraine prefers to lay its road to Europe across its neighbors with an experience of European integration.

We should pay particular attention to Ukraine's bilateral relations with each of the Visegrád members, the Ukrainian-Slovak relations being the least conflicting of them. From time to time, Bratislava demonstrates its strong irritation with the huge number of Ukrainian migrants but never goes further. The relations with Poland are far from simple: Warsaw is still waiting for Kiev's agreement with the Polish interpretation of certain historical events. In its relations with the Czech Republic, Kiev sometimes

has no choice but to smooth over the image losses caused by Czech delegations that come to Crimea to discuss possible visits of Czech tourist groups to the Crimean health resorts.

Seen through the optics of the Visegrád group, the project of institutionalization of Central Europe suggests a conclusion that its members are unwilling, albeit to different degrees, to draw closer to Ukraine, the task imposed on them by Brussels.

It seems that Ukraine will, for the nth time, offer Hungary its arguments, this time within the Visegrád group. Demonstrative persistence of Ukraine when it comes to European integration, however, will be hardly rewarded. unification with an ethnically patchy, politically unstable and economically weak state will slow down the socio-economic development of the Visegrád group, Ukraine's only road to Europe for geographic and historical reasons.

Money for the Soviet "Occupation" – or Why This Tune Will Be Played in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania Forever

Nikolay Mezhevich, *Professor, Doctor of Science, chief research associate, Institute of Europe, Russian Academy of Sciences; president, Russian Association of Baltic Studies; mez13@mail.ru*

In 2015, a collection of articles was published in Latvia on two paramount issues – money and power. the articles are about money one wants to get from someone else in order to remain in power. It wasn't the first book of this kind, nor, of course, the last one. But it wasn't an ordinary book – it had been prepared for an important occasion. In December 2015, the justice ministers of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia signed a declaration setting out a plan to calculate damages supposedly inflicted on the three countries by the USSR, demand that Russia pay them compensation, and make assessments of Soviet crimes from an international point of view.

The book is rather dull – 90% of it has nothing to do with economics or any serious research for that matter and is third-rate political journalism. Moreover, it's obvious that one economist in a hundred would be able to do sector- or region-wide accounts.

One often sees rationality behind the Soviet damages theme in Baltic policies. that is a mistake. there are various ways to prove this. the Soviet "debts" theme is a weapon that may hit those who use it. "In smaller states," says Vadim Smirnov, "political elites are more dependent on the international environment and its dynamics than are the ruling classes of large states...

Economic relations between the central authority of the former Soviet Union and its Baltic republics is a complicated, and naturally a politicized, issue.

There are various reasons for this.

First, these compensation claims is a home policy matter, which is disguised as a foreign policy issue. Second, there's nothing new in international legal practice about a country demanding money from another country in international law.

Third, one has to take account of the international dimension of the issue. Making financial claims has come into fashion in international relations recently.

To the Baltic political elites, no theoretical construct looking like an economic calculation will make any sense if it isn't based on the official "occupation" doctrine. But this doctrine is the basis of the official ideology of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and their policies and economic principles, and consequently any action that purports to substantiate this legalized phantom of limitrophe genesis automatically receives support.

The budgets of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania don't need efficient practitioners or penetrating theoreticians to put together. the job can be done by someone with the skills of an average accountant. And that's why it is never disclosed through the media what methodologies are used for calculating the supposed USSR-inflicted losses. the reader, listener or viewer is given the final amount whose provenance can't be explained convincingly even by those who have announced it.

There were large-scale national and international construction projects in the Baltic republics with extra-budgetary funding. one example are the 1980 Olympics and their impacts on the Estonian economy. "It was a mega-scale event. economically, it opened up tremendous opportunities for investment. Had there been no Olympic regatta, we wouldn't have had Piritä Tee, the TV tower, or the Olümpia hotel."

The Baltic republics traditionally enjoyed substantial privileges in the Soviet system of planned centralized distribution of resources. The Baltic republics enjoyed privileges in the Soviet system of distribution of fertilizers, agricultural machinery, imported feed grain, elite-breed livestock, etc."

Some of today's Latvian authors admit this, albeit cautiously.

By the end of the 1980s, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania showed a faster pace of economic development than the rest of the USSR. one may argue as much as one likes about the economic development level of the USSR, but the Baltic republics were indisputably its richest part.

We can accept the following passage as an axiom: one can forecast that, in the medium term, the political situation in the Baltic states stemming from historical memory is unlikely to undergo any significant changes. With the lack of any other basis for national identity, militant memories stoked by enemy images of modern Russia will remain just as much in demand among local nationalist elites.

The small size of a country is neither a shortcoming nor a reason for pride. It is a fact and a reason for high responsibility. the Baltic countries should be made to pay the maximum price for advancing the Soviet occupation doctrine and to pay it for the maximum time, up until they abandon this doctrine.

The Systemic Aspect of the EU's Blue Economy

Marina Kolesnikova, *research associate, Department of Black and Mediterranean Sea Studies, Institute of Europe, Russian Academy of Sciences; kml2007@mail.ru*

The concept of blue economy serves as the basis for the transition to sustainable development in the marine sector. there is no universally accepted definition of this concept, but it is practically equated with marine (ocean) economy.

The purpose of creating a marine management system can be defined as achieving the maximum economic effect with minimal consumption of resources and damage to the environment.

The symbiosis of the economic and environmental components of marine economy, the integration and interdependence of various sectoral, functional, and regional elements, and the universalization and integration of their management processes serve as the basis for the system.

Different relations are forming between the elements of maritime economy as a result of the implementation of cross-cutting mechanisms for their management and control of their activities and the state of the environment and support for maritime industries (by way of financial, educational, and scientific programs, regulatory legal documents, etc.). Furthermore, the qualitative changes implemented within the EU and affecting all maritime industries create additional connections that increase the degree of controllability and manageability of the system.

It MAY be assumed that the mechanisms and programs of the European union will ensure the functioning of its marine economy as a holistic system. As they get implemented, it will become possible to determine the optimal spatial placement of maritime industries by monitoring the state of the environment during the process of use thereof. It is predicted that in the future, this system will ensure effective management and sustainable development of the EU maritime activities as well as monitor their status in real time. For example, the Digital twin of the ocean program can provide the basis for forecasting and strategic planning of ocean management in short and long term, ensuring compliance with environmental and other requirements of the EU.

There is reason to believe that at the first stage, the European union will focus on achieving integrated management of maritime industries and sectors as well as on collecting data and developing an integrated database. the next stage may see the transition to the formalization of data sufficient for machine processing and the delegation of certain tasks (e.g., monitoring of oceans and seas) to artificial intelligence, as is evident from the EU documents.

An assessment of EU conceptual and planning documents suggests that within the framework of achieving the sustainable development goals for maritime economic activities, the European union will build a new system of marine management based on the implementation of new environmental standards and environmentally oriented mechanisms for management, planning, monitoring, etc.

It can be predicted that its primary efforts will be aimed at creating a multi-level multifunctional system that would deliver a given economic effect with minimal use of resources.

The implementation of a systemic approach to marine economy is particularly relevant in relation to the Russian practice of maritime activities management given the length of our coastline, the territorial remoteness of many coastal areas, and the sectoral diversity of maritime activities. this approach may turn out to be most sought after for the management of maritime activities in the Arctic, primarily due to the growing logistics attractiveness of this region and its vast natural, biological and fossil resources.

Operation Gideon: A Duel Between Venezuelan and American Intelligence Services

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Since Donald Trump took office, U.S. pressure on Venezuela has only been growing. Washington is using a vast arsenal of tools to overthrow the legally elected leadership of a sovereign state, stopping short only of direct intervention with massive deployment of U.S. armed forces and those of their allies.

On May 3, 2020, an American subversive group attempted to overthrow the Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro. However, the organization and execution of the coup were beneath all criticism. the operation failed: the terrorists were confronted and eliminated by the Venezuelan military, special forces, and police. two American terrorists and one of the Venezuelan deserters involved in the operation survived. All of them were arrested.

On May 4, 2020, Associated Press writers Joshua goodman and Scott Smith reported that Jordan Goudreau, a former U.S. green Beret (in reality, a Special Forces nurse) and the CEO of Silvercorp PMC,

had taken responsibility for the failed “operation to overthrow Maduro” and the death of eight operatives. Goudreau claimed that all those people were his subordinates and were carrying out his orders.

On May 5, 2020, President of Venezuela Nicolas Maduro said that officers from Secret Service’s presidential protection unit (U.S. Secret Service agents) were among the operatives that had carried out the armed incursion.

Trump’s reaction to this news was predictably complex and was expressed in a series of public statements. In response to Maduro’s claim that the U.S. President’s security personnel were involved in the landing in La Guairá, Donald trump said at a regular briefing at the White House lawn that “it has nothing to do with our government”. A certain lack of confidence in the President’s words and gestures and his uncertain tone indicate that trump was apparently unaware of this operation; the news of its failure took him by surprise.

The attempt by the Silvercorp mercenaries to invade Venezuela, take over an airport, and capture the incumbent President Maduro looks very bizarre indeed. Let us agree with Barbara Boland that in this incident there are more questions than there are answers.

Upon closer examination, it becomes clear that the CEO of Silvercorp PMC Goudreau is a fairly well-qualified professional in his field. therefore, when sending a group of ten men to stage a coup in Venezuela, he was clearly counting on something.

When considering this case on the merits, it immediately appears plausible that the terrorists fell victim to a deception scheme organized by Venezuelan (and most likely Cuban¹) intelligence against the CIA. the subversive group was being watched from the very beginning; the Venezuelan leadership was fully prepared for the interception, having launched a large-scale.

the operation with the landing of a group of terrorists in La Guairá has obvious similarity to the counterintelligence operation known in all textbooks of the world as operation trust; they really have a lot in common.

Should this version be correct, it is possible that Venezuela may have received at least advisory support from Cuba.

Besides the scenario that was described above (that stipulates that the foiled operation Gideon is an absolute success of the Venezuelan (and possibly Cuban) intelligence services), there is also another version of the events in La Guairá and their background, which does not favor Venezuelan intelligence. As a matter of fact, operation Gideon, a possible black-op where even Goudreau may have been used without his knowledge, bears certain signs of a successful CIA operation.

Presently, having celebrated a military victory over the American mercenaries, Venezuela is preparing for another “invasion.” Caracas believes the new invasion is likely to be exactly the same as (or similar to) the first one, that is, another terrorist group will attempt a marine incursion; what it does not realize is that the foiled landing was perhaps orchestrated to divert Chavistas’ attention to a decoy and throw them off their guard with the eventual goal of restoring the contacts, temporarily interrupted due to the events of August 2019, with the people from Maduro’s inner circle who are under powerful pressure from Washington due to the reward offered for them.

Those who nearly defected to the rebels in 2019 – the perpetrators of the coup attempt of April 30, 2019 who returned in time and the witnesses of the failure of the CIA’s special operation in August 2019 – became the heroes of the victory at La Guairá. For them, this was a great opportunity to prove their loyalty both to Maduro and the ideals of the Bolivarian Revolution. the collapse of operation Gideon was likely the result of a deception operation, in which Venezuelan intelligence beat their American

counterparts outright. However, there is another possibility: everything went according to the second scenario, and therefore, an attempt at a new coup is to be expected, where an important – if not the key – role will be played by the rehabilitated high-ranking Chavista charged with the task of striking Maduro at the moment he least expects it.

Information as the Basis for Decision-Making: The RF Foreign Ministry Crisis Management Center's Role in Repatriating Russians Stranded Abroad During the COVID-19 Pandemic.

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The year 2020 saw the most serious world emergency in recent history. Almost certainly, there had never before been a crisis that affected all countries without exception, regardless of their geographical location, political and social system, economic development level, and social characteristics. Protecting the population of their country practically simultaneously became the paramount task for all governments.

The rapid expansion of the previously unknown disease, a process that triggered vast-scale flows of diverse and at times contradictory information, led to various restrictive countermeasures. In effect, these measures have determined, and continue to determine, the lives of hundreds of thousands of people who were caught by the pandemic outside their home countries and far away from their families, and have made travel practically impossible for them. Finding ways of bringing such people back home became a principal humanitarian problem for many countries, among them Russia.

Information is vital for systemic analysis and administrative decision-making. Its role increases tremendously during emergencies and crises, situations requiring an immediate response. Governance is a process where any action may have a domino effect, and so well-coordinated circulation of data is essential for the stability of this process and for quickly finding optimum solutions.

The COVID-19 pandemic has, in addition, entailed a much stronger role for some specialized kinds of information and has put them to serious stress tests. With the disease spreading by leaps and bounds, Russia was confronted with an urgent need to come up with a mechanism for the prompt collection and analysis of multifactor information about Russian nationals who were stranded abroad and to organize their return on the basis of this information.

In fact, the Foreign Ministry launched the gathering of data on Russians waiting to return home some days before it received the order to do so in the March 23 directive: on March 19, Minister Sergey Lavrov ordered the Crisis Management Center to organize the daily collection of such information data and to report it regularly.

The numbers of Russians seeking repatriation were the main criterion in organizing their return. These numbers kept changing throughout the repatriation campaign. Numerous factors made them rise or fall.

The repatriation campaign was officially declared closed on September 18.23, By then, international air transportation had largely normalized, and one could generally plan one's own travel, though there were individual instances of organized repatriation until the end of September. According to the above-

cited sources, altogether 313,000 Russian citizens returned from 138 countries due to the escalation of the CoVID-19. There were more than 550 repatriation flights in that period.

In conclusion, we would like to give sincere thanks at Russian embassies and consulates abroad, the Russian Foreign Ministry, other Russian federal authorities and Russian airlines for providing the Crisis Management Center with vital information, for their willingness to help us at any time, day or night, and for their tremendous and selfless efforts to safely bring our fellow citizens back home in the course of a protracted and very difficult campaign.

The Truth and Lies About Srebrenica

Elena Gus'kova, *Head of the Center for the Study of the Modern Balkan Crisis, Institute of Slavic Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, Doctor of Science (History)*

These events were given a political slant, and attempts are still being made to misrepresent them in order to accuse the Serbs and support the Muslims. We must sort things out, because otherwise we will never arrive at the truth.

The numbers currently being manipulated range from 8,000 to 27,000 civilians and Muslim military personnel allegedly killed in these events. In fact, Srebrenica was a “safe area” under UN protection established in 1993 by a resolution of the UN Security Council.

In Srebrenica, the 28th Muslim combat division under the command of Naser Orić was located. They used this UN protected zone as a place from which they raided the surrounding areas and then returned to Srebrenica for rest and recreation. In practice, Naser Orić took control of the town and turned it into a kind of prison for its population, including Muslims.

When I say “Muslims,” I do not mean religion, but nationality.

“Muslims by nationality” was a special term first used in a census back in the 1960s, when the population of Bosnia and Herzegovina consisted of Serbs, Croats and people of a nationality that Josip Broz Tito called Muslims. Actually, some of them were Serbs and others were Croats. As for Muslims, they would now sometimes write in questionnaires: nationality – Muslim; religion – atheist. This is why we don't say orthodox Christians and Muslims, but Serbs, Croats, and Muslims.

The Dutch battalion stationed in the town opposed the presence of Muslim troops but could not counter the atrocities being committed by the Muslims and Naser Orić, because this was a safe area. The Dutch battalion was within the town but had no authority, especially to command and give orders to Muslims.

The Muslim division already knew that general Mladić was moving in their direction. All its commanders and part of their entourage left the town within a few days, which is why there was no resistance or shooting. Mladić entered the town unopposed. The general always had a camera with him and filmed what was going on. About 20 buses were brought into Srebrenica, and all civilians – mainly children, women, and elderly – went aboard. Mladić himself boarded each bus, introduced himself, told the evacuees not to be afraid, and said they would be taken to Muslim territory.

The buses headed for Tuzla. One should take note of two episodes that followed. As the column moved towards Tuzla, shooting broke out. It is still unclear whether this was a Serb fire or a Muslim provocation.

So, what is the origin of the version that 8,000 Muslims were killed at the time? No such thing happened. This means there was something else, some kind of events where people were killed. First alternative:

from 400 to 1,500 people, according to various estimates, were indeed killed in that column, although the column numbered tens of thousands. Second alternative: executions of captives were recorded in the village of Kravica, in a camp where Muslims were held. there was shooting there as well, and from 700 to 900 Muslim prisoners were killed. these circumstances are also being investigated. one can say that today, after so many years, ever new documents keep surfacing to present a totally different picture of what happened.

By 2006, only about 2,500 bodies were recovered. And no one knows whether these were Muslims or Serbs. But it is known that about a thousand of those who were allegedly buried at this cemetery took part in the 2006 general election.

Phantom voters. When I visited this memorial, I myself saw plaques bearing the victim's name and place of death, but the date of death was not 1995. In other words, all those who were killed or died in 1992, 1993, and 1994 were brought to this cemetery. This is why we should not be guided by the show being staged today. As researchers, we should collect material, analyze it, write a book about these events, and keep talking about them.

Someone had to bear the blame and be punished. After all, the NATO intervention in August 1995 intensified the air strikes against Serb positions, which is why the situation in Srebrenica had to be magnified.

Frankly speaking, the Hague tribunal was a true disaster, a politically biased trial, which had nothing to do with law or jurisprudence. they did not consider each case anew.

If we look at the behavior of the Croats in 1991 or at the events in Slovenia, we will find that everything was done to show they couldn't live in a state where Serbs massacred the local population, although there was no such thing.

Croatia and Slovenia were admitted very quickly. As for Serbia, its leaders have had to make their apologies to both Sarajevo and Zagreb as part of the country's ongoing accession negotiations. they have bowed and apologized for everything they did, but actually for what they didn't do. today, Serbia's relations with Croatia and partly even with Slovenia and Macedonia still include a number of complicated issues that will take decades to resolve.

Rosneft Attracts International Investors

The Vostok Oil project, recognized as one of the most powerful catalysts for the development of PJSC Rosneft oil Company, has once again confirmed the status of the Russian oil and gas giant as the clear favorite in the Russian market for foreign investors. On November 16, 2020, Rosneft's Board of Directors approved the sale of a 10% stake in LLC Vostok oil to Trafigura Pte Ltd. the participation of one of the world's largest traders has not only increased confidence in the project among the world financial community but has also aroused the interest of leading foreign and Russian analysts.

The scale of Vostok oil is colossal: it includes the Vankor cluster (15 fields, the largest of which are the Suzunskoye, Tagulskoye, Lodochnoye, and Vankorskoye fields), the West Irkinsky area, the Payakha group of fields, and the fields of the East Taimyr cluster. the oil from these fields is of the highest quality exceeding that of Middle eastern oil and benchmark Brent crude oil. Its sulfur content is 0.05%. According to Argus estimates, this oil could trade at a premium of \$10 to \$12 per barrel. the proven resource base for liquid hydrocarbons is 44 billion barrels (6 billion metric tons). Reserves density is around 17 million barrels of oil equivalent (boe) per square kilometer.

An important objective advantage of the Vostok oil project is its unique geographical location with direct access to the northern Sea Route, a promising transport artery with year-round navigation. This will make it possible to guarantee supplies to both traditional European markets and fast-growing Asian ones.

The implementation of this project will spur the development of related sectors of the economy, such as machine building, metallurgy, electric power industry, road construction, and shipbuilding.

In order to meet the project's energy needs, Rosneft has signed an agreement with PJSC Inter RAO for a set of works to design and build energy infrastructure, including power plants with a total capacity of 2.5 GW, as well as more than 3,500 km of power lines.

Experts from the Institute of Economic Forecasting of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IEF RAS) expect the project to provide additional incentives for localization of high-tech equipment and ensure an increase in domestic demand for products of various industries equivalent to 2% of GDP per year.

It should be noted that Vostok oil is a new-generation project from an environmental perspective. Advanced drilling equipment will help to minimize the ecological footprint. The project will be subject to stringent environmental requirements. The top priority in its implementation is to protect the region's fragile natural environment.

"Today, there is an understanding that this is a resource for the country's global competitiveness in the future," notes Fyodor Voitolovsky, Director of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IMEMO RAN).

Considering that the whole world economy will need hydrocarbons for a long time to come despite the development of green energy and renewable sources, the Vostok oil fields are an asset that will be in demand not only in Russia but also throughout the world.

CSTO: Strategic Development Guidelines

On October 7, 2020, under Russia's rotating presidency of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), a roundtable titled "CSTO: Strategic Development Guidelines" was held at the Russian Foreign Ministry Reception House, timed to coincide with CSTO Founding Day.

The roundtable featured an intense discussion on the status and development prospects for allied relations in all cooperation areas within the organization, including foreign policy, military and military-technical cooperation, and joint efforts to meet new challenges and threats.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's address to roundtable participants as part of CSTO Days

I welcome the participants in the roundtable meeting "CSTO: Strategic Development Guidelines."

Your meeting is a good opportunity for an informal and meaningful exchange of opinions on a broad range of issues concerning the role, place and prospects for the Collective Security Treaty Organization. These efforts are especially important now that the international situation remains tense while member states are facing numerous transborder challenges and threats, including the coronavirus pandemic.

Clearly, this objective can be effectively achieved only on the basis of international law, above all the UN Charter. The basic principles of interstate communication enshrined in it are more relevant than ever. So, it is very important for our countries to continue actively countering any attempts to revise the

international legal architecture that has evolved as a result of World War II and replace it with a West-centric “rules-based world order.”

I am confident that the CSTO will continue to demonstrate a model of truly allied relations. I wish you productive discussions and all the very best.

Sergey Lavrov Moscow, October 7, 2020.

Alexander Pankin,

Deputy Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation

The CSTO has emerged as an influential multifaceted international and regional organization with a solid, diversified legal basis that regulates its activity in all the main security areas.

CSTO member states have specified measures to counter terrorist and extremist ideology. Work is under way to draw up a complete list of banned organizations.

It seems that life today is dictating the need to further expand opportunities for using our collective forces in responding to emergencies and eliminating the consequences of natural disasters, as well as in accomplishing various humanitarian missions. We believe in expanding cooperation among our military medical services, including in responding to outbreaks of dangerous infections.

Needless to say, the coronavirus pandemic, which affected the world in general and our countries in particular, has become a very serious test for all of us, highlighting the new problems facing the CSTO. It is important for us to learn lessons from this situation and draw the right conclusions.

I consider it essential to mention the fact that this year marks the 75th anniversary of victory in the great Patriotic War of 1941-1945 and World War II. It is a major historic event that is of special importance for our peoples who fought shoulder to shoulder for the freedom of future generations and liberation from the Nazi plague.

Obviously, global security architecture is undergoing extensive changes. traditional threats go hand in hand with nontraditional ones. terrorism, extremism and cybercrime are becoming increasingly acute problems. Regional conflicts are showing no signs of abating.

The purpose of our present meeting is to see what is in store for us, how our organization should adapt to future processes, integrate into them and play an active role in international affairs. So, looking into the future, we believe that the CSTO is a living, dynamically developing, flexible, and adaptable organism. We consider it important to support this trend. We believe that our allies are willing to make adjustments, expand the scope of cooperation, coordinate our actions in a prompt and effective fashion, and consolidate the regulatory framework, taking into account the ongoing changes. Development is vital. Stasis is not a condition that should be characteristic of this organization.

The CSTO is doing a lot of important work that is not, as they say, very much in the public eye. We believe that not only those who are involved in this process – i.e., government agencies, military organizations, and the media – but also the general public need to understand what the organization is doing in the interest of their own security, in the interest of ensuring peace; that it is a collective organization where we have absolutely equal rights and opportunities and where we make decisions only by consensus, no matter how difficult or complicated they may be or whatever obstacles there may be to accomplishing our objectives.

Despite the restrictions related to the pandemic, we are committed to accomplish the priority objectives set by Russian President Vladimir Putin. We are grateful to our colleagues for supporting our ideas and

initiatives. We consider it important to keep the momentum going in coordinating and approving various documents. International tensions are rising, as are regional tensions.

Stanislav Zas,
CSTO General Secretary

The CSTO is recognized by the UN and other international organizations as an independent actor in the international arena. All of this is the result of colossal joint efforts. Is this enough? Evidently not.

Present realities require that we continue to develop the CSTO in order to comprehensively improve the collective security system and make it more efficient. It is important to move forward, clearly seeing our strategic development guidelines.

We hope that the CSTO member countries will soon complete the ratification of the third protocol on amendments to the CSTO Charter providing for the participation of other states in the organization's activities as partners or observers. This will create additional opportunities for expanding the CSTO's international contacts and lay the groundwork for bringing our cooperation with a number of countries and international organizations to a qualitatively higher level.

It is also important to further develop components of the CSTO Collective Forces, increase their mobility and enhance their readiness and capability to accomplish missions assigned to them. In this context, establishing CSTO integrated military systems, above all, integrating regional air defense systems into a unified air defense system is becoming a priority.

Another important area of our activity is to maintain and develop the CSTO's peacekeeping capability. Right now, all the necessary conditions are in place for the CSTO's peacekeeping forces' subsequent involvement in UN peacekeeping missions.

To enhance the effectiveness of the CSTO's ability to respond to modern challenges and threats, member countries will continue to strengthen their capacity to counter terrorism, extremism, drug trafficking, and illegal migration.

The problem of biosafety requires further analysis. The ongoing coronavirus pandemic has had a negative impact on all aspects of international, political and socioeconomic activities. The spread of this infection and possibly new ones will most likely remain a source of security threats for a long time to come not only in the CSTO region but also for the international community as a whole.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that we have a sufficient potential for the CSTO's progressive development. Now and in the future, the organization will be in a position to provide a guaranteed response to challenges and threats that may arise.

Anatoly Sidorov,
Chairman of the CSTO Joint Staff

The situation in CSTO collective security regions remains complicated, as evidenced by the armed conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, the domestic situation in the Republic of Belarus and the situation in the Republic of Kyrgyzstan. The situation is compounded by the spread of the coronavirus infection in all CSTO member countries and in the world as a whole.

Priorities for the coalition's military organizational development in 2021-2025 are as follows:

- developing specific components of the CSTO Collective Forces and CSTO integrated (joint) military systems and ensuring their preparation for accomplishing missions assigned to them;

- improving command and control of the CSTO Collective Forces;
- promoting military-economic and military-technical cooperation among the CSTO member states.

A key priority in developing collective security forces and assets is to enhance the combat capability of the CSTO CRRF, including by increasing the number of general support units, equipping them with modern and interoperable weapon systems, military and special equipment, and improving the command and control system.

A special role in improving the CSTO's security component is assigned to developing the CSTO Air Force. This refers above all to the quantitative composition, role and place of frontline (operational-tactical) and Army aviation.

The main efforts should be focused on providing further technical and technological support for the CSTO Crisis Response Center and national agencies of CSTO member states authorized to cooperate with it.

Overall, I would like to note that the successful implementation of the coalition's military organizational development program is one of the most challenging tasks in the CSTO format that requires significant efforts on the part of all CSTO member states, as well as the organization's executive bodies and agencies.

Sergey Pospelov,

Executive Secretary of the CSTO Parliamentary Assembly

Regrettably, for objective reasons, our colleagues parliamentarians were unable to attend this event. We hope that the rescheduled meeting of the heads of international affairs committees of CSTO member states' parliaments will be held soon and, of course, we would like to reaffirm the invitation for all of you to attend.

The Assembly primarily helps synchronize ratification procedures for the organization's international treaties. Our countries' parliaments have promptly ratified all international treaties submitted to the legislative bodies. At the same time, four treaties that were signed on November 8, 2018 have yet to be ratified by all member states.

The CSTO Parliamentary Assembly gives special attention to the implementation of international treaties and CSTO decisions at the national level. For example, it is very important for national laws to incorporate a single list of terrorist organizations and provide legislative support for operations by the CRRF and the CSTO peacekeeping forces.

To harmonize and unify national legislation, the Assembly has adopted 65 standard acts and recommendations. Importantly, all of the normative-regulatory legal documents of the CSTO parliaments contain the mandatory requirement to give consideration to all legal norms recommended by the Assembly.

Questions arise over legislative harmonization in the economic and information security sphere, in countering new challenges and threats to collective security that are related to the digitization of society and the introduction of artificial intelligence elements. We are currently finalizing the work on a draft model legislation program through 2025. Proposals regarding legislative regulations in the sphere of digital and economic security have already been submitted by CSTO member states.

Given the importance of electoral processes in ensuring national and collective security, we should consider the possibility of institutionalizing the established practice of the CSTO Parliamentary

Assembly's participation in international monitoring and observation of parliamentary and presidential elections in CSTO member states (at the invitation of duly authorized bodies).

Overall, the Assembly, as the organization's interparliamentary cooperation body, will continue working to accomplish priority objectives set by its presidency.

We believe that the implementation of these objectives is usually not limited to specific deadlines. Many of them retain their relevance and are pursued over the course of several years, even when the next presidency has already defined its own priorities.

If these ideas receive support, I would like to ask Mr. Pankin as a representative of the foreign ministry of the state holding the CSTO rotating presidency, as well as all our colleagues present here today, to help put them into practice.

Greece-Russia Relations in the 21st Century

Georgios Katrougalos, *former foreign minister of Greece (02.15.201-07.07.2019), Professor of Public Law*

Diplomatic Relations between Greece and Russia are 192 years old. But long before they were established, our countries were connected by strong bonds based on shared cultural and spiritual traditions, as well as on their shared history.

Ties between the two states were never interrupted, not even during such difficult periods as the Cold War era.

In the 21st century, bilateral contacts between Greece and the Russian Federation became even more frequent and systematic, and in my country, there has always been an interparty consensus on that.

The major significance of Greek-Russian ties, which is recognized by all Greek people, manifested itself most graphically under Karamanlis, who replaced Simitis. In 2004, after Cyprus, the first traditional destination of every new Greek prime minister, Konstantinos Karamanlis made his first foreign visit to Russia. He visited Moscow two more times – in 2007 and 2008, meeting with President Putin a total of five times.

When the SYRIZA party was in office (2015-2019), cultural cooperation, a key ingredient of friendly relations between our two nations, was given a new impetus. The year 2016 was declared Greek-Russian Bilateral Year under the aegis of the Russian president and the Greek prime minister. It should be noted that it was Greece's first experience in organizing such a wonderful bilateral year, while it is common practice for Russia. The year testified to Greece's enduring and stable interest in a good and constructive relationship with Russia both on a bilateral and EU level. It was designed to stress our shared cultural and spiritual heritage.

The tradition of cultural exchanges continued during Sergey Lavrov's visit to Athens in October 2020, when a joint memorandum on the Greek-Russian Year of History in 2021 was signed. This was a very good choice, since next year will mark the onset of the Greek Revolution, in which Russia played such an important role.

The strong bonds of friendship that exist between Greece and Russia arise not only from mutual sympathies and cultural and religious ties between our people but also from the genuine identity of our views on bilateral relations and a significant similarity of views on international affairs. In the present-day multipolar world, the two countries stress the need to maintain the dynamically developing system

of international relations built around the UN as opposed to unilateral steps, withdrawals from multilateral diplomacy mechanisms and the disruption of international agreements.

Greece is an EU member, but it has always sought to serve as a bridge between the EU and Russia. This is why Greek governments have invariably considered Russia an inalienable part of the European security architecture. Athens promoted this stance as part of the Corfu Process for the European security architecture during the Greek OSCE chairmanship in 2009.

Moscow's approaches toward issues that are of major national importance to Athens, for example, the Cyprus dispute and the application of the Law of the Sea to relations between Greece and Turkey, are fairly close to those of Greece and the Republic of Cyprus.

Furthermore, regarding the application of the Law of the Sea, which is of major importance for us, Russia has taken a clear-cut stance in favor of international law, as evidenced by comments from its official representatives.

Russian Foreign Ministry official spokeswoman M.V. Zakharova spoke in the same vein at a weekly briefing on September 2, 2020. During his visit to Greece in October 2020, Sergey Lavrov also took an unequivocal position in favor of countries' sovereign right to expand territorial waters to 12 nautical miles, noting that Russia's stance is based on the provisions of the Convention, specifically Art. 3.

Greece and Russia will soon be marking the 200th anniversary of their diplomatic relations. Close Greek-Russian partnership is based on traditional friendship between the two nations, as well as on the principles of mutual respect, including respect for mutual interests, which will remain key to bilateral relations in the future.

Angola and Russia: 45 Years of Friendship and Cooperation

Téte António, *Minister of External Relations of the Republic of Angola*

Cooperation is an essential tool for strengthening any country's position in the international arena, as well as for maintaining its political, economic and social stability.

Interstate relations are an array of concepts of international relations that predetermine a starting point in the practical implementation of foreign policy objectives for any state. In this context, the Republic of Angola was wise enough to choose the best possible partners, in particular signing the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the USSR in 1976. Importantly, both parties were motivated by traditional feelings of friendship, cooperation and solidarity.

Political-diplomatic relations between Angola and Russia correlate with our country's political age: they were officially established in 1975, when it gained independence, putting an end to the nearly five-century colonial rule by Portugal.

In the late 1980s and the early 1990s, following domestic reforms in the USSR and the fall of the Berlin Wall, which predetermined the end of the Cold War, Russian-African relations went through a period of strategic reconfiguration in response to contemporary challenges that lasted 15 years, when new actors questioned Russia's presence in Africa.

In 2005, friendly relations between Russia and Africa began to regain momentum. Strategically important countries were identified on the continent. Angola is proud to be part of this select group of partner countries, where major Russian companies have their offices, for example, Lukoil, Gazprom and Alrosa, which are involved in nuclear energy, oil, natural gas, and diamond production projects.

Russia helped the Angolan people gain independence, defend their territorial integrity and sovereignty, and win a war. Right after Angola gained independence Russia supported our country and helped defeat the apartheid regime, which was a threat to Angola, as well as to the entire African continent.

Angolan-Russian cooperation is multidimensional, but it is especially advanced in the defense sector. The Russian Federation is Angola's strategic defense partner due to its historic role in the anti-colonial and civil wars.

Sectors such as geology and mineral extraction, including the diamond industry, are significant areas of cooperation with the Russian Federation. In addition to the production of diamonds, Alrosa also facilitates their direct sales.

With regard to personnel training, the Russian Federation is Angola's most reliable partner. Every year, the Angolan state sends over 100 students to various Russian universities, both civilian and military.

According to UNICEF, the Angolans have acquired extensive experience in conflict resolution, humanitarian assistance and national reconciliation, as well as in using an array of methods and mechanisms to achieve peace, calm and stability. This experience was used to support African peoples in conflict.

Since it gained independence, Angola has been pursuing a proactive foreign policy, being closely involved in resolving international issues, sensibly and consistently consolidating its international positions, and successfully responding to challenges that arise, including political and economic stability, peace, human rights, and democracy.

Karim Khakimov, the Pioneer of Soviet Diplomacy in the Middle East: His 130th Birth Anniversary

Oleg Ozerov, deputy director, Department of Africa, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation; olegozerov2018@gmail.com

November 28, 2020 was the 130th birthday of Karim Khakimov, a Soviet diplomat who has played a major and still underestimated role in enabling the USSR to gain a foothold in the Middle East. Khakimov developed methods and principles for our diplomats to follow in that restive region that remain useful today. In fact, it is only today, nearly a century after this extraordinary person was put in the forefront of Soviet foreign policy, that we are beginning to see the entire importance of his legacy.

In a 1930s questionnaire, Khakimov said that he had been born in the village of Dyusyan in the Il-kulmin volost in what is the Belebey district of present-day Bashkortostan. "My family were peasants.... they were land tillers. My parents had a farm with a small plot of land, which fell apart in 1918....," Khakimov put in the questionnaire.

Later, it transpired from a census record that he was born in 1890 and that by 1917 his family was not that poor as it owned about 10 hectares of land. These discrepancies in birth date and property records may have become known to the NKVD and partly explained charges of espionage and counterrevolutionary activities against him and his execution in 1938.

An adventurer by nature, Khakimov could adapt to any environment. Remaining without any source of living and not wanting to go back home, since he was afraid that his parents would interpret his poverty as failure (he was back home only in 1914), he joined a coal mine in Konibodom, a city in what today is Tajikistan, as an ordinary miner and stayed in that job for about three years. Later, Khakimov was proud

of this stint, calling himself a proletarian, and told a prominent Soviet politician about this. Valerian Kuybyshev gave him a good reference and supported him for a long time afterward.

Khakimov became a "Muslim communist" as he would refer to himself. With Allah in his heart and a couple of volumes of Karl Marx in his bag, he embarked upon a path that eventually brought him to the Kommunarka execution site, where his life came to an end on January 10, 1938.

After his work at the third Congress of the Communist International (Comintern), he received an appointment, at Kuybyshev's recommendation, at the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs (foreign ministry), which sent him as consul general to Mashhad and Rasht in Persia. During these postings, which took place from 1921 to 1924, Khakimov learned his initial diplomatic skills.

At that point, the Soviet union's Middle eastern policy began to show points of contact with the policy of czarist Russia toward Arab movements of liberation from ottoman rule.

As his next big achievement, Khakimov ensured the participation of Soviet Muslims in the World Muslim Congress in Mecca. thereby Khakimov gave a boost to the congress, an event organized by Ibn Saud in seeking recognition not only as king but also as the guardian of the two Muslim holy sites, Mecca and Medina, which would automatically give him a higher status and greater legitimacy than those of all other rulers in the region.

But soon, Moscow changed its mind. After giving support to Hejaz and Nejd, it abandoned its large-scale policy of penetrating the Middle east, comprehensive and indiscriminate support for all anti-Western revolutions and action against Britain and adopted a policy of seeking trade with all countries, including the kingdom of Hejaz and Nejd. Industrialization began in the Soviet Union and keeping it going was Moscow's main concern now. It now sought a trade agreement with Riyadh. that was what practically all instructions to Khakimov from Moscow were about.

This change of policy, which came about while Khakimov was still in Hejaz, angered the fervent revolutionary romantic and sincere Muslim, and in 1927 he asked to be recalled to the USSR.

In 1929, Khakimov was appointed plenipotentiary representative of the USSR to Yemen and representative in that country of Blizhvostgostorg (the export and Import office for trade with turkey and the Middle east). Simultaneously, he was coordinator for the local branch of Comintern. It was due to his efforts that the USSR signed its first accord, a treaty on Friendship and trade, with Yemen in 1928.

early in 1932, Khakimov returned to Moscow and enrolled at the Institute of Red Professorship. But he wasn't able to stay away from Middle eastern affairs for very long.

For pragmatic reasons, Khakimov was sent back to Saudi Arabia in 1936 to try to negotiate a trade deal and replace Tyuryakulov, who had gotten very tired of fruitless talks with the intransigent Saudis and asked to be brought back home. In July 1937, Tyuryakulov was arrested and on October 3 executed on a charge of participation in a "pan-Turkic conspiracy."

All we know is that the "Red Pasha," as Khakimov was dubbed in the Saudi kingdom, shared Tyuryakulov's plight. on September 6, 1937, he was recalled to Moscow. He returned courageously, sensing he was in big trouble but still hoping to prove his innocence. In November, he was arrested and on January 10, 1938, was shot.

Ibn Saud was shocked by Khakimov's death and decided to freeze his relations with the USSR. Diplomatic relations between Riyadh and Moscow remained frozen for 52 years.

What Khakimov has done for us, Middle east specialists, is of tremendous value. In effect, in collaboration with Chicherin and under his guidance, Khakimov laid the foundations for our Middle eastern diplomacy, borrowing much from the experience of czarist Russia. After that, it was practically a

rule in Soviet diplomacy, which has passed into post-Soviet Russian diplomacy, that diplomats to be accredited to Middle eastern countries should have a good command of the Arabic language and good knowledge of the culture of the country they would be posted in. He and his followers set an example of respectful attitudes to ancient Persian and Arab civilizations, and mainly to people who represented those civilizations.

We should remember that such people often fall victim to envy or libel on the part of those around them who fail to see the scale and significance of their work.

The Northernmost Vineyard: A Mysterious Comintern Intelligence School Deep in Bashkiria

According to old-timers, Georgy Dimitrov – the general Secretary of the Comintern, the future leader of the People's Republic of Bulgaria, and a person of considerable importance in the world history – loved to wander around this vineyard, evidently reminded of his native southern lands. He had company: Finnish Communist leader Otto Kuusinen, future German Democratic Republic President Wilhelm Pieck and Chairman of the GDR State Council Walter Ulbricht, future co-founder of the Second Austrian Republic Johann Koplenig and others.

What else, besides going for strolls, were they all doing in such a faraway place? In the year of the 75th anniversary of the Victory in the Second World War and the 100th anniversary of the Foreign Division of the Cheka (Inostrannyi otdel VChK) – the forerunner of the Foreign Intelligence Service (Sluzhba vneshney razvedki) – this article is an attempt to bring together the known fragments of information about the remarkable educational institution located in Kushnarenkovo during the war years – the Comintern military – political and intelligence-diversionary school, whose graduates were recruited both by the Comintern itself and by the Soviet intelligence services.

A Book, published in the Bashkir Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in the Soviet times, put forward the following version: Comintern members, evacuated to Kushnarenkovo, “worked, studied, wrote books, prepared for the construction of a new life in their countries.”

On the one hand, we are talking about people who played a notable role in the world history in the Cold War era, such as east German head of intelligence Markus Wolf³ and his 1971-1974 representative in Cuba Herbert Hentschke. Agustín Gómez, the two-time USSR soccer Cup winner, was also a graduate. He led a parallel life as a “clandestine” member of the Spanish Communist Party.

The school leadership was also looking ahead into the postwar future. However, they already played historically significant roles during the wartime.

According to the seminal work the organizational Structure of the Comintern by g. Adibekov, e. Shakhnazarova and k. Shirinya, the institution, under the moniker “Institute no. 301,” first appears in Dimitrov's letter to V. Molotov, the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR, dated December 13, 1938. the letter conveyed that, going forward, the Comintern's Communication Service will carry out all the supply and construction work under the name “Institute no. 301.”¹² It might be worth clarifying that “the Communication Service” of the Comintern consisted of its couriers and intelligence service.

My first conclusion is that people like Gómez and an unnamed Czech were trained for as intelligence operatives. this statement is all the more justified, given that with the beginning of the war, the

Communications Service was reorganized. Instead of permanent couriers, they began to use one-time couriers from among the persons selected for this purpose by the Communist Parties. It all fits together.

Interestingly, the Specialized School in Kushnarenkovo is sometimes understood by contemporary Western historiography not as a newly created educational institution, but as the International Lenin School (Meshdunarodnaya leninskaya shkola) evacuated to Bashkiria.

there are different views on how decisive studying at the International Lenin School was for furthering one's party career. A typical example is the academic, but rather stormy, discussion about the number of School's graduates in the governing bodies of the Communist Party of Great Britain, which recently took place among British and Irish researchers. Some believe that there were only a few such graduates, others talk about the mass nature of this phenomenon.

Prior to physical exercises, the morning in Kushnarenkovo began with the group leaders reporting "briefly, almost in a military manner, about the personnel," and everyone stood at attention.

As the author was told in the Kushnarenkovo museum, the school also taught the radio techniques and radio propaganda, the organization of the partisan movement, and, as the most exotic subject, even jiu-jitsu. the memoirs of a Czechoslovak communist say, "I had to study, run, exercise, shoot, box, and dance. A special jazz orchestra played at the dances."

As far as we understand, the school also addressed problems that could be characterized as moral and psychological. For example, according to Wolf, "a question was posed at one of the seminars, of how an undercover agent, introduced into the Wehrmacht, should act if he was included in a firing squad. A hard question of conscience."

Kushnarenkovo had an airfield, where a branch of the Ufa parachute and gliding club operated. Future spies used it for training in landing of the airborne troops. In addition, leaders of the international communist movement, such as "la Pasionaria" Ibárruri, whom the Soviet people instantly recognized, were landing on the same airfield.

It IS Impossible to overlook the fact that the Comintern leaders were ready to sacrifice even their relatives.

However, these losses also led to certain conclusions. According to M. Wolf, the fate of the deceased graduates "saved our lives to some extent. We understood that there was no point in sending our graduates directly deep behind the enemy lines to Germany." As a result, most of the students were focused on working with prisoners of war and on the radio. they went to their countries when the war was already over.

The specialized school in Kushnarenkovo was disbanded following the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943 (although in personal conversations with the author, the museum personnel in Kushnarenkovo expressed the opinion that the school had been relocated to the Kiev area).

Big Politics and Archaeological Endeavors

Mikhail Konarovsky, *leading research associate, Institute for International Studies, Moscow State Institute (university) of International Relations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federations, Ambassador extraordinary and Plenipotentiary; makonarovsky@gmail.com*

Late In December 1979, the Soviet Union moved troops into Afghanistan. the nearly decade-long presence of Soviet armed forces in Afghanistan in a bid to help the People's Democratic Party (PDPA)

put its utopian dream of building Soviet-modeled socialism into reality was a complicated and controversial period not only in Afghan but also in our own history, and it still receives mixed assessments.

Not long before Soviet tanks crossed the Amu Darya river into Afghanistan to get enmeshed in an escalating bloody conflict in that country, Soviet archaeologists made what has come to be considered one of the world's most sensational discoveries – at Tillya Tepe (“Golden Hill”) in Jowzjan province in northern Afghanistan, they found the largest treasure trove in the world history of archaeology, a unique assemblage of 20,585 golden objects, many of them adornments that had belonged to rulers whose names and lives remain unknown.

For a long time, much of the history of that region, which lay south of the Amu Darya, remained unknown, though practically all Europeans who happened to visit it at various times were invariably impressed by the diversity of artifacts that they had seen there. eyewitnesses said that ancient coins, utensils whose purpose was unclear, fragments of pottery etc. were often offered to foreigners at traditional caravanserais along key trading routes.

Remarkably, it was with an archaeological project that France began to build its relationship with Afghanistan after recognizing its independence in 1922. the French Archaeological Delegation in Afghanistan (DAFA) was set up in 1922 and was given the authority to conduct excavations in central and northern regions of the country. DAFA's first head, famous archaeologist Alfred Foucher, became France's first ambassador to Afghanistan. Italy followed suit, and for many years, an Italo-Afghan group carried out excavations near Ghazni, which had been the center of the powerful Ghaznavid dynasty many centuries ago.

Those who have invariably admired Ai-khanoum included Soviet and Russian archaeologist Viktor Sarianidi, whose name is inseparable from the issue that is the main reason for this article. one can easily imagine Sarianidi's reaction to news that the Taliban, the fanatical Islamists who seized power in Kabul in the 1990s, had barbarously destroyed Aikhanoum. they did the same to the world's two tallest statues of Buddha (53 and 35 meters high) carved into the side of a cliff in Bamyan, and to Greco-Buddhist monuments near Jalalabad, in eastern Afghanistan.

In those turbulent days in the 1990s, politics and ideology forced their way into the forefront, as has often happened in history, - the Buddha statues failed to comply with the Taliban's world outlook and their ideas about beauty. A few decades later, a similar “exploit” was performed by Islamic State militants on the site of the ancient city of Palmyra in Syria.

The vast assemblage of jewelry, which was handed over to the Afghan government, consisted of more than 20,000 pieces from pendants, necklaces and rings of various kinds to pearl- and turquoise-adorned crowns. Before that, a royal treasure trove discovered in Kabadian, Tajikistan, north of the Amu Darya, had been considered the largest hoard of Bactrian-era artifacts to have been found. It was a collection of more than 1,500 coins and nearly 200 items of jewelry. After the Soviet archaeologists left the Bactrian gold excavation site, Afghan armed guards were posted around it. But those were stormy times, and who knows how many of those precious things might have disappeared later, some of them perhaps being sold in antique bazaars in Peshawar in Pakistan.

The Bactrian gold theme became a hostage to big politics during the Soviet military presence in Afghanistan and remained so after the USSR withdrew its troops from the country. the West and the mujahidin made extensive use of it in propaganda wars against the Soviet Union and the PDPA government.

A new wave of allegations that the Soviet Union was after the Bactrian gold rose in the West shortly before Moscow started withdrawing its troops from Afghanistan in summer 1988. Possibly, those claims

partly stemmed from misinterpretations of Sarianidi's point that the Bactrian antiquities would be safer if they were temporarily removed from Afghanistan with the consent of the Afghan government and under UNESCO control.

Archaeology was by no means the only area of Soviet-Afghan cultural cooperation, which was particularly intensive and diverse in the 70s and 80s. Afghanistan received much assistance from the Soviet union's Culture Ministry, State Committee for Cinematography (Goskino) and Academy of Sciences, and from Soviet arts associations.

I received an assurance that the Bactrian gold had been safeguarded completely from one of the former Afghan king's advisers, who, however, threw a fly in the ointment.

Later, I found out that Sarianidi had indeed visited Kabul and confirmed that the collection was intact. His visit had been organized and financed by the United States' national geographic Society. As far as I know, no Russian authority was notified about this either by the Afghan government or by the Americans, who ruled the roost in post-Taliban Afghanistan. Sarianidi himself made no public mention of it either.

In spring 2011, a widely publicized exhibition of artifacts from the Kabul Museum dating to various epochs opened at the British Museum in London. the BBC and CNN paid a lot of attention to the exhibition in their programs. the show was also reported by Russian television arts channel Kultura. Artifacts shown at the exhibition included objects from the Bactrian gold collection.

The Bactrian gold still hasn't made its way to Russia. If it does, Sarianidi won't be there to see this happen – he passed away in December 2013.

The Salute

Vladimir Sergeyev, *expert on Latin America*; katsergeeva13@gmail.com

I spent much of my childhood in Ukraine. the son of an army officer, I moved from garrison to garrison due to my father's promotions. each time, I had to adjust to a new group of children, and that wasn't always a smooth process. It was one thing if you were put in, say, a fifth-grade class that consisted of boys and girls of the same age from the entire garrison. everyone would be glad a new kid had joined the class and friendships were normally quick to develop. But what was happening outside school was a different story: kids of all ages would come together in outdoor spaces and form a group with its own established rules and leaders. that was a milieu you needed some effort to adjust to. You had to go through various trials to win the right to be accepted by the gang as one of their own. But if you were accepted as such, you were one hundred percent safe. the gang would never have betrayed you and would always have protected and taken care of you.

Being Russian, Jewish, Mordovian or whatever else and the children of generals, noncommissioned officers, dishwashers or stokers, we were an image of a communist society that, according to posters hanging all around, would take a whole twenty years to come.

We were Young Pioneers, but we were a bunch of hooligans too. our activities were combinations of good works and mischief, but the latter clearly outdid the former as was regularly evidenced by traces of parental belt-lashing on more distinguished bottoms.

One of our usual hiking routes was a path that took us into a forest and ran past a small burial mound. We knew it was a grave because there was a small faded star at the top and a plate with an inscription below. What was written on it was illegible.

A couple of times we saw a grim-looking unshaven one-armed drunk who was sitting there. He was always swigging cheap port out of a bottle and looking toward the forest.

One day, as we were walking past him seated in his usual place, he motioned to us to stop in letting us know he was finishing his port. As he was handing us his empty bottle, we heard his voice for the first time. "My buddies Petro and Nyuma are lying here, guys," he said. He pulled out a cigarette, struck a match clumsily and added, nodding toward the edge of the forest, "that's where the bastards killed them. We saw it all from here."

After realizing that we weren't going to go away, he gave us the whole story. There was a gang of boys, just like ours, that was led by double-dyed hooligan Petro, who was always up for a good fistfight. It was a mystery, though, how a red-haired Jew, who could play the violin, ended up there.

It remains a puzzle what could have brought together a scrawny book lover and the big-fisted desperado who was one of the worst pupils at school. Yet their friendship was enviable.

The war was so overwhelmingly sudden to burst into their lives that they could see endless rows of German tanks, trucks and cars trundling by eastward before they knew what was happening. troops that moved through the town left the population alone and threw sweets to kids. then a new wave came, and the town was quickly filled with police from among locals and with all kinds of scum. one wonders where they all might have come from so fast. All local Jews were brought together in the school stadium and deported to an unclear destination. Nyuma and another boy managed to escape by some miracle or other. A friend sheltered them in a shed in his courtyard for several days. Then police started going from house to house and the shed ceased to be a safe place to stay. Petro brought around another three teenagers, and everyone decided to hide in the nearby forest.

The first two pairs reached the forest safely, but the final pair ran across a German motorbike patrol just about twenty paces before getting to the forest. Petro, who was carrying the rifle raised it but was riddled through by a spurt of submachine gun fire. the red-haired Jew apparently wasn't considered worth spending cartridges on. A lanky corporal, with a lot of showing off, stabbed Nyuma to death with his bayonet to the laughter of the other soldiers.

One-Armed was the only survivor of the foray. Nor did much of the local population stay alive either.

One-Armed had a secret dream – he wanted his fallen friends to be honored with a proper military salute, the firing of rifles. this dream, which almost became an idée fixe, made him visit various government offices, where he wasn't listened to and was threatened with being dispatched to a sobering-up station.

We decided to take action. Putting on our red Young Pioneer neckties, we went to the command office of our garrison. there, the duty officer, after hearing our case, said we needed to go to the local conscription station.

At the conscription station, a dapper captain in shiny boots explained to us gently that he was aware of the matter but that the two teenagers buried there we were talking about were not mentioned in any records of the Defense Ministry or archives of volunteer army units or partisan groups. nor were they known to have inflicted any damage on the enemy. Consequently, they were civilian war fatalities and therefore ineligible for military honors.

We made a plan, hard as it is to believe. on May 9, Victory Day, as our families were celebrating at home, we escaped under convincing-sounding pretexts, "borrowed" a red flag and a drum from the

Young Pioneer center at our school (there was a bugle there too, but we didn't take it because none of us knew how to play) and went outside the town.

After stepping into the forest, we lined up and marched off to the grave to the beating of the drum. one-Armed was there, of course, and watched our procession in amazement. We lined up again at the grave, raised our hands in the Young Pioneer salute, and then each of us, when commanded, fired three shots in the air with his toy gun – any self-respecting schoolboy had an abundance of those.

We observed one-minute silence that I will never forget. With our flag, drum and red ties we were representing the state. everything was genuine and done the adult way. "Thank you, guys," one-Armed said finally, put on his cap and headed off to the town. We never saw him again. Someone said he had gone away to live with his relatives either in Rostov or in Kazan.

Comradeship and patriotism don't depend on whether one's name sounds nice or not and that very often empathy is inversely proportional to the shininess of boots.

I don't know whether that grave is still there. But I do know that two unrecognized heroes of that terrible war who never had a chance to achieve military fame still lie in a forest outside the town on Izyaslav. A Ukrainian and a Jew. May you guys always be remembered.